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Bible Truths v Popular Christianity

WHAT IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD?

EVERY CHRISTIAN BELIEVES in a Divine kingdom of one kind or another, because it is so prominent in the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. Countless millions pray, in the words of the Lord's prayer, *'Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.'*¹ Few, however, understand the true nature of the kingdom that they pray for so earnestly.

The coming kingdom of God, and how we may attain it, were the principal themes of our Lord's preaching when he was on earth. Jesus *'...went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God...'*² When he sent out his disciples, it was also to preach about the kingdom, as is recorded, *'...he (Jesus) sent them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick.'*³ If the disciples preached the kingdom, they themselves must have not only believed it, but understood it, so let us examine exactly what they understood by this kingdom.

THE KINGDOM ESTABLISHED IN THE PAST

Both Jesus and the disciples knew that there had been a kingdom of God on earth before - it was the kingdom of Israel. When Israel wanted to be like the surrounding nations and have a human king, God told the prophet Samuel, *'...they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.'*⁴ Although God gave them a king, He still retained overall sovereignty and the kings were said to sit on *'...the throne of the LORD...'*⁵ This throne was at Jerusalem and because of Israel's subsequent wickedness, the kingdom was later destroyed. However, God made a

¹Matthew 6.10 ²Luke 8.1 ³Luke 9.2 ⁴1 Samuel 8.7 ⁵1 Chronicles 29.23

promise that one day it would be restored. The prophet Ezekiel, who witnessed the overthrow of the kingdom and was among the captives taken to Babylon, foretold the restoration of the kingdom in these words:

'I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him.'⁶

GOD'S APPOINTED KING

The disciples of Jesus knew that this previous Divine kingdom had been a literal kingdom on this earth, with a literal capital city, Jerusalem and a literal throne called '*the throne of David*', David being the most illustrious of the kings of God's appointment. They also knew that the one '*whose right it is*' to sit on the restored throne was Jesus, because they would have been told of the message of the angel Gabriel, given to Mary before Christ's birth:

'He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David.'⁷

A PARABLE OF THE KINGDOM

Thus when Jesus, at one stage in his ministry, approached the city of Jerusalem, of which so much had been prophesied, the disciples thought he was going to set up the new Kingdom there and then. This demonstrates that they perceived the kingdom as a literal kingdom, with its capital at Jerusalem. Jesus did not tell them that they were mistaken about the nature of the kingdom; how could they be, when they had been preaching about it? He told them, in effect, that their expectation was premature. He spoke a parable about a nobleman (himself, of course) who was to go into a far country to receive a kingdom, **and to return**.⁸ The meaning of the parable is inescapable. Jesus was not going to establish the kingdom at that time, but after he had been to heaven to receive it from God, and had returned to the earth.

In the light of this teaching, we can understand the words of Jesus when he said that the kingdom was '*at hand*.' He could not have meant that its establishment was imminent. It was at hand in the sense that from then

⁶Ezekiel 21.27 ⁷Luke 1.32 ⁸Luke 19.11-27

onwards it was available to all who would accept his teaching; available as a hope for the future but not for immediate realisation, otherwise the parable of the nobleman would have no meaning.

THE KINGDOM TO BE ESTABLISHED IN THE FUTURE

After the resurrection of Jesus, the disciples again asked him when the kingdom would be set up, saying, *'...wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?'*⁹ That question reminds us that even then the kingdom had not been established, confirming what is said above about the kingdom not being imminent when first preached. It also shows that the disciples still understood the kingdom to be the restored kingdom of Israel. Again, in reply, Jesus had no criticism of their concept of the kingdom, but said that the time of its establishment was known only to God.

Throughout the rest of the New Testament, even when the Church had become firmly established, the kingdom of God was still referred to as a future hope, not an accomplished fact. Thus, after Jesus had ascended to heaven, Peter, perhaps with the parable of the nobleman in mind, urged the people to repent because one day God would send Jesus back to restore all things.¹⁰

Later on, the Apostle Paul preached to the men of Athens in these words:

*'...he (God) hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained (that is Jesus, who has the 'right' to the throne of David); whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.'*¹¹

This, and many other references, show that the apostles always regarded the kingdom as a literal one, to be established on this earth, at the return of Jesus.

THE EXTENT OF THE KINGDOM

The principal differences between the future kingdom of God and the kingdom in Old Testament times are that its influence will be world-wide, and that in Jesus it will have only one all-powerful and infallible ruler.

⁹Acts 1.6,7 ¹⁰Acts 3.19-21 ¹¹Acts 17.31

The world-wide extent of the future kingdom is taught in a number of places in the Scriptures. For example, Daniel in the Old Testament tells us that God will set up a kingdom upon the ruins of the kingdoms of men, and that it will fill the earth.¹² Paul said, in that speech at Athens we have already referred to, that Jesus will '*judge the world*'. The Apostle John, describing a vision he saw of that future time, wrote:

'...The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.'¹³

These passages, and others that could be quoted, show that the kingdom of God will not be merely a Jewish kingdom, but will extend over the whole world.

BLESSINGS OF THE KINGDOM

The omnipotent but beneficent rule of Jesus is also well documented, particularly in those Old Testament prophecies which describe the blessings of Christ's reign as follows:

- There will be perfect justice,¹⁴
- There will be universal plenty and prosperity,¹⁵
- There will be world-wide peace and security,¹⁶
- There will be cures for all afflictions,¹⁷
- There will be universal knowledge of God and obedience to Divine laws.¹⁸

Yes, all the intractable problems now facing human governments will be solved, and give place to lasting peace and righteousness. This is the true Christian hope, which God has assured us by His very existence will be established, for He has said, '*...as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD.*'¹⁹

THE KINGDOM MISUNDERSTOOD

It may be asked, if the literal kingdom of God on earth is taught so widely and so plainly in the Scriptures, why so many people who regard

¹²Daniel 2.44 ¹³Revelation 11.15 ¹⁴Psalms 72.1-4; Isaiah 11.1-4 ¹⁵Psalms 72.16; Isaiah 35.1 ¹⁶Psalms 72.7; Isaiah 2.4; Micah 4.4 ¹⁷Isaiah 35.5,6,10 ¹⁸Isaiah 11.9; Jeremiah 31.34; Zechariah 14.16 ¹⁹Numbers 14.21

themselves as Christians do not believe in it, but place their hope in an illusory notion of eternal bliss in heaven. There are two main factors contributing to this widespread unbelief. Firstly, the introduction into Christianity of the pagan notion of immortal souls going to heaven, meant that there was no longer any need or place in Christian dogma for a literal reign of Christ on the earth.

Secondly, it was in the interest of the established Church to encourage the teaching that the kingdom of God was the Church, because that greatly enhanced the power and authority of the Church. So they promoted it, in spite of the fact that, as we have seen, long after the Church was established by the apostles, the kingdom was still spoken of in the Scriptures as belonging to the future.

Other false ideas about the kingdom of God have arisen through a careless reading of some passages of Scripture. For example, the kingdom of God is sometimes referred to, particularly in Matthew's gospel, as the kingdom of heaven. This is wrongly taken by some to mean a kingdom in heaven. However, we have shown clearly why it is so called. It is God's kingdom, and He is in heaven. Jesus has gone to heaven to receive it and to return. When he returns it will be set up on the earth, and in a limited and figurative sense, it will be '*heaven on earth*'. This is the meaning of those words in the Lord's prayer, '*Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.*'²⁰

Then again, on one occasion Jesus said, '*...the kingdom of God is within you.*'²¹ Some think this means that the kingdom is a spiritual '*reign of grace*' in the hearts of believers. However, if the context of the saying is examined, it will be seen that this was not at all what Christ meant.

His words are:

'... The kingdom of God cometh not with observation (the Greek word here means "with intense watching"): Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you ... And they shall say to you, See here; or, see there; go not after them, nor follow them. For as the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven; so shall also the Son of man be in his day.'²¹

²⁰Matthew 6.10 ²¹Luke 17.20-24

The whole tenor of the passage is that when the kingdom comes, it will be obvious to all. It will not come with '*observation*', that is, it will not be so transient or indistinguishable that we will have to watch intently in case we miss it. Neither will it appear in some obscure part of the globe requiring someone to point it out by saying, '*Look, here it is!*', but it will be something that happens '*among you*' or '*in your midst*', as the word really means, so that there will be no doubt about it when it comes, just as the lightning flashing across the sky is plain for all to see. So when the saying is taken in its context, it gives no support to the idea that the kingdom is an abstract idea.

Finally, much is made of the statement of Jesus that '*...My kingdom is not of this world...*',²² which some take to mean that it is not a literal kingdom on the earth. Again the true meaning is given by the context, made clearer in a modern translation:

'...My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.'²²

The last part of the verse shows that Jesus was not speaking about where his kingdom is going to be set up but where it comes from. It is not '*of this world*' but '*from another place*', not of human origin, but of God, and it will therefore be brought into being by God, not by human power, not even that of Christ's servants, until the time is ripe in God's purpose.

PLACES OF HONOUR IN THE KINGDOM

While we still do not know the day or the hour of our Lord's return, there are Scriptural reasons for believing that it is now very close and that, mercifully, there is not much time left to the present rulers of this world. When Jesus returns, those who have been his faithful followers will be rewarded with eternal life and places of honour in the kingdom. Jesus said: '*To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne...*'²³

It is our sincere wish that you, with us, may share that honour.

Keith Deadman
Kingswinford, West Midlands

²²John 18.36 (NIV) ²³Revelation 3.21

Bible Truths

KING BELSHAZZAR

THE BOOK OF Daniel contains a record of Belshazzar's feast and the events which led to the overthrow of the kingdom of Babylon by Cyrus the Persian. As the king sat with '*...a thousand of his lords...*', the fingers of a man's hand were seen writing a message of doom on the wall of his palace. No one could interpret the writing except Daniel, who told the king the meaning '*...God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it...Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting...Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians*'.¹

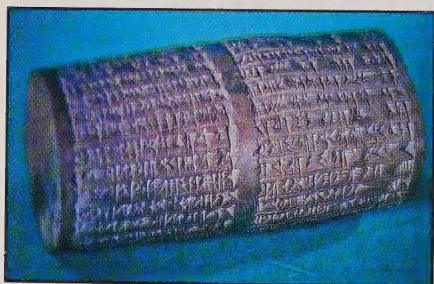
For at least two thousand years the book of Daniel contained the only known historical reference to this king of Babylon called **Belshazzar**. This led of course to critics of God's word saying that he was a character who did not really exist but was just part of Jewish mythology. But in AD1854 a Mr J E Taylor, who was British Consul in Basra (a city now in Iraq), was asked by the British Museum authorities to investigate a tel (or mound) some 150 miles north west of the head of the Persian Gulf. The tel contained the remains of a ziggurat structure. During this archaeological search, a baked clay cylinder was found built into each corner of the ziggurat. Each cylinder was covered in cuneiform writing. One of these, when translated, was found to mention the name of Belshazzar and his father Nabonidus.

Other evidence found by archaeologists, now shows that Nabonidus was the last king of the Babylonian Empire and that at the time Daniel was in the court of Belshazzar, Nabonidus his father had gone on an expedition to conquer more territory, leaving Belshazzar to rule in his absence. This also confirms the accuracy of the Bible record. The Bible tells us that Daniel was made '*...the third ruler in the kingdom*'.² Why was he the third ruler and not the second? Simply because Belshazzar was the second highest and the absent Nabonidus was the first. The cylinders found in the ziggurat contain the story recorded by the scribes of Nabonidus, describing the history of the city - that it was a city called Ur and the ziggurat was built to worship the moon god whose name was SIN. The first book of the Bible also mentions this city as the place where Abraham lived before he was told to leave his home and journey to a land that God would show him - the land which we now know as the land of Israel.³

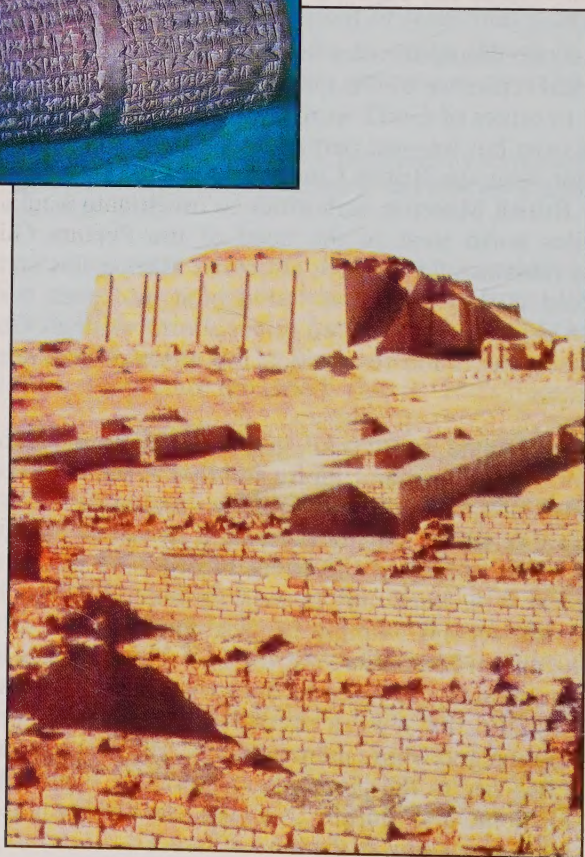
¹Daniel 5.1-5, 25-28 ²Daniel 5.29 ³Genesis 11.31, 12.1

This cylinder also tells us how Nabonidus enlarged the ziggurat and placed on top of it a shrine to his god. Here again the work of the archaeologist has uncovered further confirmation of the historical accuracy of the Bible. The vanity of a proud conqueror caused him to write a boastful account of his conquests and mighty works - a vanity that was used by God to also keep safely preserved this record of Belshazzar, to be revealed in our days to confirm the truth of His word!

Ken Dennis
Dartford, Kent



*Above:
Cylinder
of Ur*



Partially rebuilt Ziggurat Nabonidus at Ur

Sayings of Jesus

‘You are my friends if ...’

IF, IS ONLY a little word, and yet it makes so much difference to the meaning of that saying of Jesus, ‘*You are my friends if you do what I command.*’¹

Jesus was here talking to his disciples. He knew that it was only going to be a matter of hours before he was to be arrested and would have to face death at the hands of the authorities, both Jewish and Roman. He was strengthening his followers’ faith to face the future without his physical presence, and he went on to reassure them:

‘... for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.’²

That which Jesus had learned from his Father, was a set of rules for this life. They are not only rules for this life, but to lead us to eternal life, because earlier Jesus had told Nicodemus:

‘...God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.’³

We all have that same invitation to become friends of Jesus and to share eternal life with him under the same conditions if we do whatever Jesus commands.

I bought a new computer some time ago, and as I unpacked the box it came in, I found the instruction manual - seven chapters and three appendices, about 200 pages in all. Not bad for a complex piece of electronic equipment, I thought. Then I looked into the box again, and

¹John 15.14 NIV ²John 15.15 NIV ³John 3.16 NIV

discovered nine other books and booklets about specific aspects of the machine and operating system. I found that I had two thousand pages of instructions for my computer, all of which were considered important by the manufacturer. I can't ignore part of those instructions because I don't particularly like what I read there, or because I think that I know better than the person who designed the machine or wrote the software. If I try to do things my own way, the system probably won't work and I certainly can't expect it to fulfil the advertised claims of the manufacturer.

In a way, life is like that and the same applies to the commands of Jesus which we can find in the Bible. Through Jesus, God has made us an offer of something far greater than this life. If we are going to take Him up on His offer though, we have to read the instructions and abide by them. We might think that a set of instructions for life would have to be vastly more complicated than those for my computer, but they are all contained in twelve hundred and fifty five pages in my Bible, and that not only includes the instructions but also many stories used as illustrations and examples.

Jesus' instructions are not difficult to keep, and he told his followers:

'All things have been committed to me by my Father. No-one knows the Son except the Father, and no-one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.'⁴

If we look at these instructions Jesus gave to his followers and which we can find in our Bibles, we will find a code of conduct and ethics that makes a lot of sense for a peaceful and successful life now. Not only that, but also something which has the immeasurably greater advantage of qualifying us for that promise, *'... whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.'*³

Jesus expanded that point and introduced another vital concept when he instructed his followers to:

'...Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved...'⁵

³John 3.16 NIV ⁴Matthew 11.27-30 NIV ⁵Mark 16.15,16 NIV

In the Gospel of Matthew we can read of an occasion when Jesus was asked by an expert in the Jewish law which was the greatest commandment in that law. His reply was just as appropriate to us now, two thousand years later, as it was then for those under the Law of Moses:

‘...“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: “Love your neighbour as yourself.” All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.’⁶

Here Jesus was quoting from Deuteronomy, one of the Old Testament books of the Jewish Law, which stresses the concept of a total commitment to God based on love and respect rather than fear and dread that was and still is a feature of pagan mankind’s ideas of religion. That same love and commitment have to be extended to Jesus himself as well, because if they are, then Jesus has promised us the love of God in return, in words that link in with the title of this article:

‘Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him....If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.’⁷

God has promised that if we really do love him with that total commitment we shall receive a tangible reward. When he wrote his first letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul quoted some words of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah:

‘...we speak of God’s secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. However, as it is written: “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him”...but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit...’⁸

The spiritual revelation which Paul was writing of is the Bible, the word of God. Here we shall find not only the details of the love of God but also the reward God promises to those who love Him. That reward is a place in the kingdom of God and of Jesus Christ and it is in that kingdom that we

⁶Matthew 22.37-40 NIV ⁷John 14.21-23 NIV ⁸1 Corinthians 2.7-10 NIV

shall experience the ultimate fulfilment of Jesus' promise: '*If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.*'⁷

Jesus said that to love God was the most important of all the commandments, but he also said that the second command is like it, '*love your neighbour as yourself.*'

It was Jesus himself who demonstrated the greatest example of this love for others, in his own self-sacrifice. He told his disciples about it shortly before he was arrested and crucified:

'As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.'⁹

Many of Jesus' commands were given or illustrated in the form of parables, stories that had a hidden meaning and perhaps the best known of those parables illustrates this concept of unselfishness and service to others. Luke's Gospel account records the parable of the Good Samaritan and when Jesus finished making his point that we must take every available opportunity to help others, he told his hearers: '*...Go and do likewise.*'¹⁰

In addition to the Good Samaritan there are another thirty eight parables of Jesus recorded in the Gospels, covering almost every aspect of life. If we can follow the good examples and avoid the bad ones shown by Jesus in these stories, we shall be well on the way to being numbered among the friends of Jesus. In those parables we, who want to be the friends of Jesus are told that we must not be afraid to put forward the word of God and to show our obedience to him by our way of life. We are told to be sure of our grounding in the faith by building our lives on the bedrock of the Bible, the word of God. We are warned that we must be ready for Jesus to return at any moment, to set up the kingdom of God on the earth. We are assured of God's mercy at the judgement that comes before the reward promised to the friends of Jesus, if we continue to obey that simple instruction, '*You are my friends if you do what I command.*'

⁷John 14.21-23 NIV ⁹John 15.9-13 NIV ¹⁰Luke 10.37 NIV

Real Christianity means following Jesus and to follow him, we must believe what he believed and obey his teachings. Jesus makes us an offer of being much more than just followers. He tells us that we can be his friends, but in order to claim that friendship we must learn what he expects of those friends, and then follow his instructions. It is no use thinking we can be Christians without that knowledge and obedience and it is no use expecting the Christian reward without first living a Christian life. Jesus has issued the invitation and has shown us the way. God has laid down the rules and has given us an indication of the glories of that reward.

There is perhaps one passage of the Bible where we read of Jesus talking to his disciples that gives us a summary of this subject. He said to them:

‘Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.’¹¹

The kingdom of God, and our places in that kingdom, are a gift from God if we show Him in our way of life that we are the friends of Jesus - now.

Colin Holdich
Nottingham

¹¹*Luke 12.27-32 NIV*



COVER PICTURE

THE ARRIVAL OF Springtime in England is a welcome relief from the short and often dark days of winter. The beauty of spring flowers on a bright day is reflected in this picture of Henley-on-Thames in Oxfordshire. The river Thames here flows under an elegant five-arched bridge which is over 200 years old. Once a year, the town hosts the famous Henley Royal Regatta which attracts oarsmen from all over the world.

Spring is the season of renewal - of new life springing from the earth in all its varied forms. It reminds us of the Divine promise to make all things new, as we read in the words of the prophet Isaiah:

‘For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.’¹

‘For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.’²

The words of the prophet are a reminder that God has a plan for this world which He created in all its beauty. The Bible tells us that God will establish a world-wide kingdom on earth to replace all forms of human government. (See article on the Kingdom of God - page 1) We can have a part in that time to come if we heed the message of God’s word, as Jesus said to his disciples:

‘Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom... but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.’³

God’s word cannot fail and His promise is just as certain of fulfilment as the coming of Spring. As we look forward then to the approach of Springtime, we can look forward to that time of great joy when God will make all things new and fill the world with His glory.⁴

¹Isaiah 61.11 ²Isaiah 65.17 ³Matthew 7.21 ⁴Numbers 14.21

Bible Warriors

- Joshua

THE HISTORY OF the world is filled with the names of men and women, who in their lifetime, were regarded as leaders of their nation. One of those listed is a man called Joshua. He was one of the rare 'great leaders', a title to which others have laid claim to, with little success. Some are elected or appointed to the office of leader, but then they fail to fulfil the mandate of their position.

Joshua, of the tribe of Ephraim, one of the twelve tribes of Israel, was not such a man. He had witnessed the plagues in Egypt, the massive Exodus of the Israelites which occurred when he was about forty years of age, being one of the two million or so that experienced the miraculous escape from Pharaoh through the Red Sea, followed by 40 years wandering in the wilderness. It is before this wandering by the nation of Israel, that Joshua is mentioned in the scriptures. Originally his name was Oshea or Hoshea, meaning '**God saves**' and later changed by Moses to Jehoshua (Joshua).¹

This change in name by Moses indicated the desire to lift the thoughts and actions of the people Godward, and to lead them from total reliance upon earthly leaders, to seek help from God. Joshua first distinguished himself, accompanied by Caleb, when twelve spies were sent to reconnoitre the land God had promised them. Joshua and Caleb returned with a good report but the other ten spies gave a negative answer.²

Joshua was appointed by Moses, as his successor. However, prior to actually taking over the leadership of the people, Moses gave him wise advice:

'... Be strong and of a good courage; for thou must go with this people unto the land which the LORD hath sworn unto their fathers to give them; and thou shalt cause them to inherit it. And the LORD, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed.'³

¹Numbers 13.8-16 ²Numbers 13.3, 26-33; 14.6-10 ³Deuteronomy 31.7,8

So Joshua, whose name means '**Jehovah is Salvation**', was tutored by Moses as God commanded, and was greatly blessed by God for the task he was soon to undertake.

THE MAN WHO WAS A SOLDIER - SAINT

Joshua has been rightly called, '*The first soldier consecrated by sacred history.*' It would be profitable as we study this man chosen by God for a specific purpose, to look at his profile in the different roles he fulfilled in his lifetime.

As a son:

Nun, the name of Joshua's father means 'continuation' or 'perpetuity', a characteristic that was to play an important part in Joshua's life. Nothing is known of his mother. One usually finds, however, a good and gracious woman in the background of a man who reaches a position of influence, power and honour. Doubtless, Joshua's parents feared the God of Israel, and he continued in their godly influence.

As a slave:

He was born during the years of bondage in Egypt, when his nation suffered under Pharaoh. He would have been acquainted with the weary complaints of a people humiliated by the proud Pharaoh and the taskmaster's whip. Joshua little realised that while he was a slave, he was destined to become Israel's supreme leader and commander. He had witnessed the moral and social degradation of his people, because of the surrounding idolatry that existed. This experience was to prove an asset when, in God's due time, he assumed the leadership of the nation of Israel.

As a servant:

This was a position he undertook from a very early age. A tangible evidence that he was being prepared for the responsibilities of leadership, was his unswerving loyalty and devotion to duty, in that he was called '*the servant of Moses.*'⁴

⁴*Numbers 11.28*

As Moses assistant:

This was a position of great honour, culminating in going with Moses to ascend Mount Sinai, to receive the '**Ten Commandments**.'⁵ Joshua remained on the lower slopes of Mount Sinai, while Moses went higher to meet with the Angel, the one who would give him the commandments.⁶

As a soldier:

It was however, Joshua's victory over Amalek that opened the door to further responsibilities. This incident is the first time that we see Joshua as a military commander in battle. The Israelites had reached a place called Rephidim, where they were unexpectedly attacked by the Amalekites. The appropriate time came for his promotion, to select and organise the fighting forces of Israel, and engage the Amalekites in battle, for Moses had said to Joshua, '*Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek.*'⁷

As a statesman:

What a great example of unselfish statesmanship was Joshua. The division of the land between the tribes was completed; the Tabernacle was set up and the cities of refuge were appointed; the service of the priests and Levites was set in order. All of this was accomplished with the precise thoroughness which characterised Joshua as a wise statesman and leader. On completion of all these tasks he continued to guide Israel in the worship of God and adherence to the Divine law given through Moses.

In all these roles, Joshua never failed to remember his position of service, not only to the nation of Israel, but firstly as a servant of the living God.

FROM SERVANT TO LEADER

Joshua, now recognised as a man capable of undertaking the position of **Commander of the people**, knew how to plan Israel's campaigns, with the ability to muster and control his troops efficiently in the field of battle. He was able to effectively use spies to prepare the way for his advancing forces and to develop the strategy for the fight ahead. Above all he

⁵Exodus 24.13 ⁶Exodus 32.15-17 ⁷Exodus 17.9

displayed and exercised his faith, trust and confidence in God. He was a man of deep thought, making use of prayers to God for help and guidance, after which he would engage the battle.

In times of crisis he was enlisted by Moses to undertake various tasks, such as the temporary removal of the Tabernacle from the people and the camp of Israel.⁸ When the leadership and authority of Moses was challenged, Joshua showed his loyalty by a vigorous protest.⁹ After the return of the spies from the Land of Promise, he was publicly commended by God before the people.¹⁰

This endorsement would inevitably have shown the nation, the God given position that Joshua now held as second to Moses the leader of the people, before they crossed the River Jordan. The leadership of this multitude was then passed on to Joshua. Forty years of wandering in the wilderness had elapsed and Joshua at eighty years of age, was presented by Moses to the High Priest and the people before the Tabernacle, to proclaim him as his successor.¹¹ This occurred prior to Moses death, so that Joshua could receive both public and Divine endorsement before the new generation of people and receive his charge from God.¹²

Following the death of Moses, Joshua's greatest work now commenced and is recorded in the book that bears his name. He emerges as an outstanding leader of faith, courage and determination, taking his place among the great men of history.

Joshua was pre-eminent as a military commander showing both courage and skill. His military strategies, methods of warfare and the deployment of his forces have been recognised over the centuries and military commanders have emulated him to this day.

In the book 'Battles of the Bible', the authors, both military men of modern Israel, view the wars of the past in terms of the present. They state that *'...Besides offering the military background and interpretation of the events that shaped biblical history, the critical examination of wars and matters military in the Bible affords many lessons that hold good up to the present day.'*¹³ Joshua however, was first of all a good soldier of the Lord his God whom he obeyed as Captain of the Lord's host.¹⁴

⁸Exodus 33.11 ⁹Numbers 11.24-29 ¹⁰Numbers 14.29-32 ¹¹Numbers 27.18-23; Deuteronomy 1.38 ¹²Deuteronomy 31.14-23 ¹³Battles of the Bible by C Herzog & M Gichon (Pub. Weidenfeld & Nicolson) ¹⁴Joshua 5.13-15

We further read concerning Joshua: *'...As a great soldier, Joshua was fully aware of the limitations imposed on him by the Israelites' inferiority in armament and training for set battle. Consequently, he based his tactics in battles such as that of Merom, on the Israelites' qualities of speed, stealth and knowledge of the terrain, and so crushed the otherwise unbeatable enemy. It was this approach which therefore became the model for subsequent Israelite commanders.'*¹³

THE CONQUEST OF THE PROMISED LAND

It is without doubt that he had God's help, without which success would have eluded him. God had spoken to Joshua after Moses' death, instructing him concerning the nation of Israel's entry into the promised land. God said to him *'...go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel.... There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. Be strong and of a good courage....'*¹⁵

This statement *'Be strong and of a good courage'* was repeated many times to Joshua, such was the Divine help given to him. Therefore, considerable thought and dedicated planning, coupled with faith and courage was applied to his campaigns. This was the precise mental attitude Joshua had, which comes out so forcefully after crossing the River Jordan and entering the land that God had promised His people Israel. Joshua was to command and judge Israel for twenty-eight years, under the guiding hand of God.

Joshua was now established and recognised as the Divinely appointed commander, by the people. He realised that the fortress city of Jericho barred the Israelites' way and being a man of faith and initiative he quietly and thoughtfully took a strategic hill viewpoint from which he could determine what further action he should take. Whilst planning the assault, he saw an impressive sight *'...behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come.'*¹⁶

¹³Battles of the Bible by C Herzog & M Gichon (Pub. Weidenfeld & Nicolson)

¹⁵Joshua 1.1-9 ¹⁶Joshua 5.13-15

THE FALL OF JERICHO

Joshua proceeded to carry out God's command to conquer the land. The first objective to feel the full force and might of this nation of Israel and their God, was the city of Jericho. This is a familiar story, yet the way the city was captured shows Joshua's complete confidence and trust in God. The strategy was simple yet frightening to the inhabitants of Jericho. Spies had been sent into the city to gather information. In God's wisdom they were sheltered by a woman named Rahab, who later features in the genealogy of Jesus Christ. The success of this campaign was the way in which it was carried out. One week was to elapse before the city literally fell before the armies of Joshua. The whole of the sixth chapter of Joshua recounts the events of how Jericho fell. The people of Israel with trumpets blowing marched around the city once a day for six days, but on the seventh day this was to be repeated seven times and on the seventh circuit of Jericho the people were to shout when the priests blew the trumpets.



The battles of Joshua

When this occurred the walls of the city fell and Israel captured the city. Joshua led the people to victory under God's guidance, as the record tells us *'So the LORD was with Joshua; and his fame was noised throughout all the country.'*¹⁷

This was to be the first of many battles that Joshua would win and in every incident he placed his faith, trust and confidence in God to guide him, even when some of the people disobeyed God's command not to

¹⁷Joshua 6.27



The ruins of Jericho

touch or take any goods. Those who disobeyed were duly punished and the nation later suffered in the battle for Ai. Joshua then *'...rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the LORD until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads. And Joshua said, Alas, O Lord GOD, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us?...O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies!'*¹⁸

Joshua sought God in prayer for an answer for their defeat. God's reply was swift and positive *'...Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?'*¹⁹ Action was needed to redress the situation. God informed Joshua of the sin committed, and the punishment was executed. Joshua consolidated the armies of Israel, and prepared for the attack on Ai. The

¹⁸Joshua 7.6-9 ¹⁹Joshua 7.7-10

strategy used was successful, but God spoke to Joshua again: *'...Stretch out the spear that is in thy hand toward Ai; for I will give it into thine hand. And Joshua stretched out the spear that he had in his hand toward the city.'*²⁰

After this the city of Ai fell to the forces of Joshua. His response to this victory was to build an altar to the LORD God of Israel on Mount Ebal. This action demonstrated again his complete confidence in God, and his obedience.

THE DAY THE SUN STOOD STILL

The conquering of the land from the south to the north by Joshua, was a great military feat. The next battle he was to engage in involved many cities and towns all governed by minor kings who had joined themselves together, as the allied Canaanite confederacy in the battle area of Beth-Horon. The fighting was intense, yet despite the tiredness of the armies of Israel, Joshua realised he had to press for victory. God had already rained great stones from heaven upon the enemy, and Israel were now on their way to victory.

Night was falling and there was only one way that Joshua could succeed. He needed the light and time, which from the human stand point was an impossibility; but Joshua again showed his faith in God. His answer to the problem was for the Sun to stand still. So Joshua prayed for the daylight to be extended and an incredible miracle occurred. This is the only instance in scripture where the God of Heaven responds in such a way to the voice of a mere mortal man. So in the sight of all Israel, Joshua called out these words:

*'...Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies...So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day. And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the LORD hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the LORD fought for Israel.'*²¹

With the capitulation of the southern kingdoms, Israel was able to occupy the area. It now remained for Joshua, with God's help, to direct the armies of Israel to conquer the northern territories.

²⁰Joshua 8.18 ²¹Joshua 10.12-14

JOSHUA AS A STATESMAN

Further battles followed that were hard won. Each successful victory for Joshua and Israel was in the knowledge that God was fulfilling His promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as well as those spoken to Moses, that Israel would occupy the whole land. Having secured all the land, Joshua now divided it among the tribes of Israel as directed by God. On completion of this task he instructed the children of Israel how they should continue to worship and honour God, by conforming to the Law of Moses.

What a wonderful example of unselfish statesmanship Joshua was! The division of the land was finished, the Tabernacle properly set up, the cities of refuge appointed and the orders for the Levitical priesthood and services were in place. All of this was accomplished with the precise thoroughness that characterised Joshua as Israel's Premier and military leader, an honour indeed.

To achieve this honour he had to display a number of basic qualities which are:

1. Godliness
2. Self-discipline
3. Loyalty
4. Courage
5. Determination
6. Obedience
7. Endurance

JOSHUA AS A TYPE OF CHRIST

As Joshua fought in mortal combat, there was also a spiritual warfare to be engaged in, to which the above characteristics apply. This is important if one is to be a true disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. 'Joshua', being the Hebrew equivalent of 'Jesus' carries the same meaning ie, '*Jehovah is Salvation*'. The man Joshua was therefore, a type of the Lord Jesus and demonstrated powerfully what is required of a true servant of God.

He was like Christ, 'A saviour' and brought the people into the promised land, a task for which he had been Divinely selected and commissioned.

- Like Christ - He was filled with the spirit of wisdom.²²
- He trusted in the protection of God.²³
- He lived by the word of God.²⁴
- He was obedient to the will of God.²⁵

With these superb qualities Joshua pointed forward to the Saviour 'Jesus Christ', who will in due time establish his promised kingdom, a kingdom filled with Divine blessings. The time for this event to occur is very near indeed, because as God promised Joshua that he would lead them into the land of promise, so also will God through His Son the Lord Jesus, the greater than Joshua, bring the whole world to His command.

As God blessed Israel, so we too can receive blessings providing we listen to what God has to say in His Word, the Bible. As Joshua said to Israel, '*...cleave unto the LORD your God, as ye have done unto this day ...Take good heed therefore unto yourselves, that ye love the LORD your God.*'²⁶ At the end of his life, Joshua summed up his conviction in these words: '*...but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.*'²⁷

Joshua died at 110 years of age, a righteous man of God and through the Psalmist God says:

'Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help'...BUT... 'Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God.'²⁸

Such was JOSHUA - A TRULY HONOURABLE BIBLE WARRIOR.

John Cordial
Maidstone Kent

²²Deuteronomy 34.9 ²³Joshua 1.5; 6.27 ²⁴Joshua 1.8 ²⁵Numbers 32.12; Joshua 5.14
²⁶Joshua 23.8-11 ²⁷Joshua 24.15 ²⁸Psalms 146.3,5

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